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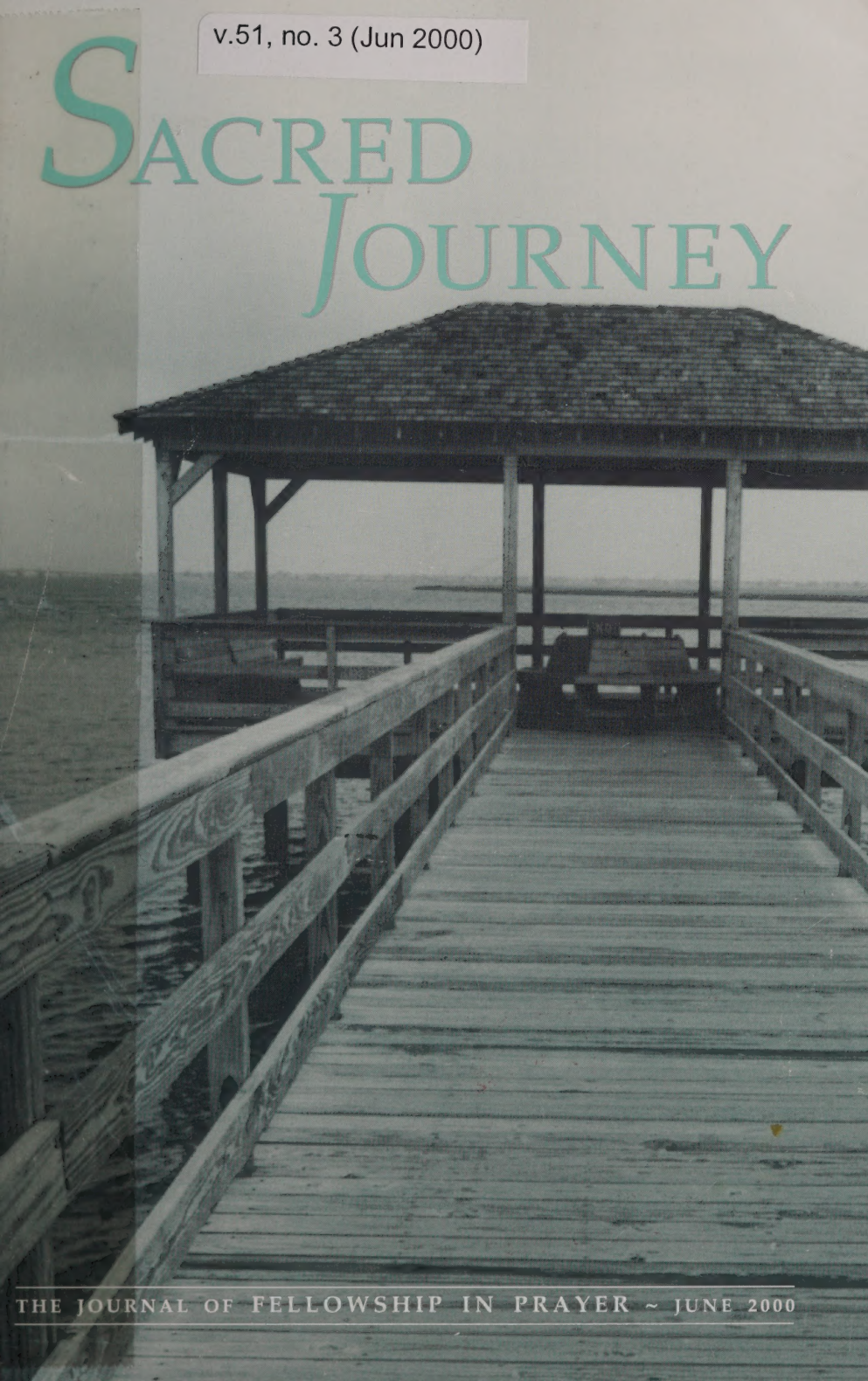
SACRED JOURNEY



THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ JUNE 2000

SACRED JOURNEY®

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is

to encourage and support

a spiritual orientation to life,

to promote the practice of

prayer,

meditation,

and service to others,

and to help bring about

a deeper spirit of unity

among humankind.

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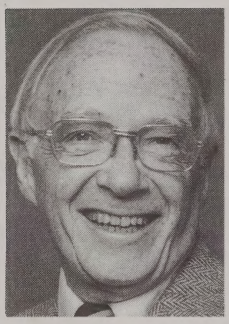
Cover photo by Mary Julia Kephart

IT'S CELEBRATION TIME!



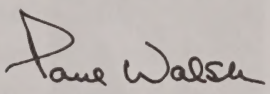
This month, as most of you know by now, Fellowship in Prayer will celebrate its 50th anniversary with a major conference—"Companions on the Sacred Journey"—on the campus of Princeton University. I hope you will join us. It's going to be a great weekend, with major presenters—Dr. Larry Dossey; Ann Ulanov, Jungian analyst, author, and faculty member of Union Theological Seminary; ten workshops; a half dozen prayer circles, and much more. (See our "ad" on page 26 for more details.)

The diverse, creative, and experiential nature of the workshops and presentations reflect a constantly expanding awareness and understanding of ourselves, and our relationship to what Michael Lerner, the editor of *Tikkun,* the journal of the Jewish Renewal Movement, describes as "that tremendous creative and healing power, or presence, that many of us call God, or Ultimate Reality," and whose nature is kindness, compassion, and love in all its forms and manifestations.

Sacred Journey readers have been in the forefront of the search for the spiritual path that is right for each of us as individuals, the path that will help us merge with

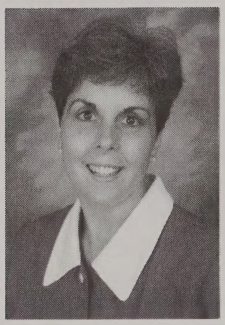
the spiritual power that is both within us, at the core of our being, and all around us, saturating every part of this sacred universe. This spiritual adventure is reflected in the diversity and "interspirituality," (to use Brother Wayne Teasdale's word) that pulsates through the presentations, the workshops and prayer circles, and the companions on the sacred journey who have come by many different paths to sit beside you and pray with you in the ancient loveliness of the town and university of Princeton. We look forward to meeting with you in person and sharing our mutual journey.

God between you and all harm,



Paul Walsh

HEAR, GODWRESTLERS



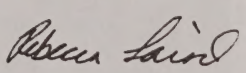
There had been traffic in the Lincoln Tunnel and construction on the New York City side. With only minutes to spare, I turned in to the closest parking garage. Whatever it cost, I would pay or be late. Why I had signed up for this course in mid-town Manhattan? Even on a weeknight the thirty mile trip from my home in New Jersey was fraught with obstacles and delays. While questioning my decision, I found my way upstairs to an auditorium in the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church where a small group gathered. At the appointed time, a blonde man with an easy smile approached the lectern. For ninety minutes, Dr. Randall Balmer took us on a walk through two hundred years of Evangelical Protestantism introducing us to characters and social shifts both noteworthy and incredible.

Dr. Balmer continues to share his infectious enthusiasm for the wildly diverse and robust reality of American religion in *Question & Answers*. Mary Murphy, resident storyteller at this month's "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference, relays a true seaside tale of Peggy, a would-be-mermaid, who wished upon the stars and moon

for want of love. Professor Elizabeth Bartlett profiles Sarah Grimke, abolitionist and women's rights activist of the early nineteenth century whose scathing prose rankles and inspires, generations later. In *The Ways of Prayer,* faithful contributor Nan C. Merrill, tells of her daily discipline of repeating the prayer of abandonment written by Charles de Foucauld, until it becomes a song of gratitude. In "A Little Like Lazarus" Wendy Wilson Greer tells of a spiritual healing that pulled her from depression and reoriented her life in this month's *A Transforming Experience.* S. Kevin Regan provides our end piece—a *Prayer Song* raised in the predawn hours by a chorus of God's creatures.

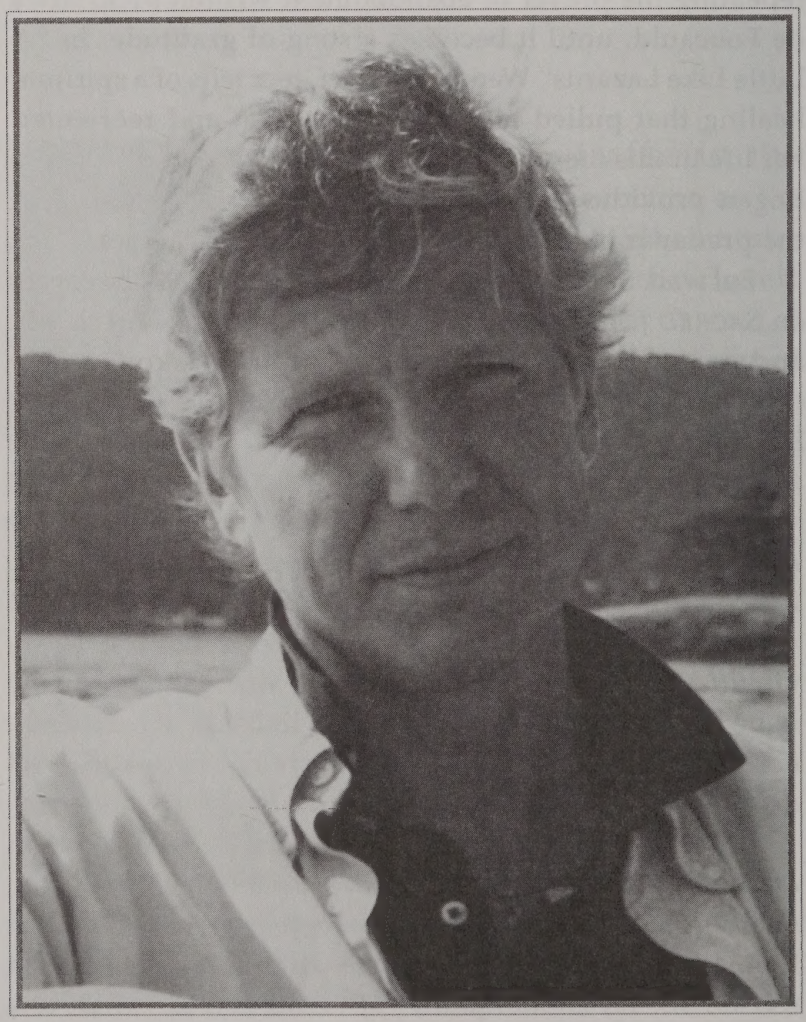
But wait. Stop. Promise me this before you close the covers on *SACRED JOURNEY.* Turn to *Prayers* and breathe in slowly and recite along with Rabbi Arthur Waskow: *Hear, Godwrestlers: Breath of Life is our God: Breath of Life alone.* Exhale. Shalom.

Blessings,



Rebecca Laird

Randall Balmer



Christian Balmer

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

The Zoo of American Religion

Randall Balmer

Randall Balmer is professor of American religion at Barnard College, Columbia University in New York City and author of Blessed Assurance *and* Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory, *which was made into an Emmy-nominated documentary. His office, with its paper-piled oak library table and walls adorned with family photos and license plates from stops along his journey, sits in the shadows of the Interchurch Center where many mainline Protestant denominations and religious agencies long have been headquartered. While we talked a reporter from CBS News phoned. Regularly Dr. Balmer is sought out to interpret or give comment on religious events for the major media outlets. He understands his role as that of a "public scholar"—what he knows, he shares, not just with his students but with us, so that we all may better appreciate our unique place in the wonderful, unruly world of American religion.*

Sacred Journey: If I stretched out a lab specimen as a zoologist might, and told you it was a creature named "American Religion," what might you, as the resident expert, describe as it's dominant characteristics?

Randall Balmer: My first reaction is that there is not a particular animal that would represent religion in America. It's a whole zoo, and that's what makes it so interesting. That's what keeps my interest in the study of religion in America. There is just endless variety and American religion is constantly evolving, constantly mutating. New species are evolving all the time, and I think that has to do with the peculiar context of religion in America.

The United States is the first nation—in the West at least—not to have a religious establishment or a state church. The First Amendment, which allows both for the free exercise of religion and prohibition of established religion or an established church, has encoded this into our culture. It set up, I think, a free market of religion where religious entrepreneurs compete for a popular following. No religious tradition in America can rely on the assistance of the state, and so leaders constantly have to be out there in the marketplace competing for new people.

In this whole "zoo" of American religion what has evolved here on these shores?

Some of the quintessentially American religions are Mormonism, Christian Science, Seventh Day Adventists, and the Nation of Islam. Some of the serpent handling groups in Appalachia are uniquely American. These examples offer an interesting case study in parallels. In most cases a charismatic leader galvanizes a following that relies on a sacred text that builds upon the scriptures or interprets them in a unique way. The Mormons have the *Book of Mormon* and the Christian Scientists have *Science and Health With Key to the Scriptures*. A highly centralized authority structure helps keep people in line. I think there is also something about

the American context or landscape that leads to the spontaneous generation of religious groups.

Is there a relationship between the religious entrepreneurial spirit and the American "Westward Ho" mentality that settled the frontier?

The new world offered a religious blank slate and all the religious adventurers who came over here were allowed free reign to construct their own visions of a godly society.

Give us some examples of religious adventurers who have left their mark on American religion.

One of the recurring themes seen in many American religious leaders is the way they use religion to reinvent themselves. Joseph Smith, for example, the leader of the Mormons, starts out as a kind of treasure hunter; he's digging for buried treasure and he comes across, in his words, this testimony, these golden tablets, and then he becomes the church leader. He was always reconfiguring himself in the American context which offered a huge array of possibilities. Aimee Semple McPherson, the founder of the International Church of the FourSquare Gospel would be another wonderful example. Taken to the depths of despair with the death of her husband she reinvented herself as a traveling evangelist and flamboyant personality. She was a household name in her time. Billy Sunday, baseball player for the Chicago White Stockings, reinvents himself as an urban revival preacher after having preached on what he called the "kerosene circuit" in little towns in the Midwest. Then there was Father Coughlin, who saw radio as a way to responds to local critics and answer people's questions about

Catholicism. He then evolves into this anti-New Deal crusader and gets involved in Nazism. And then there is a woman by the name of Alma White who started the holiness church called the Pillar of Fire and was a vocal vegetarian decades before that was a popular option.

Is there a common characteristic shared by these religious leaders?

We are a culture utterly enamored of celebrity. If someone is charismatic, he or she can pull off almost anything. All of those I have mentioned knew how to use it. Billy Graham also trades on celebrity. I'm not saying this is bad or necessarily nefarious. It is simply that charisma is the coin of the realm when it comes to religion in America.

How does this religious impulse get expressed today?

Reporters call me every so often saying, "Gee, looks like we're really seeing a religious resurgence right now," and I have to demur and say, "Well, I'm not sure, it's the religious impulse just taking different forms." I think we Americans are incurably religious and that is one of the characteristics of religion in America.

I'm just reviewing the latest Gallup book of survey data and since Gallup began polling on the question in 1947, somewhere around 94% of Americans say they believe in God or a Supreme being. We are off the charts compared to other Western countries. In the 1990s and on into the new millennium, we are seeing that people are obsessed with spirituality.

In *Blessed Assurance* you assert that Americans express their social discontent through religion rather than politics. Explain this a little more.

We have in America an extraordinarily healthy religious environment. The last time I checked my directory, there were fifty-four Baptist denominations in America. That is an extraordinary number of Baptists, but it also suggests the diversity of religious groups in America. The First Amendment created an environment where people can, and in fact do, associate with various religious groups. It also provided a kind of safety valve for other forms of discontent or dissent in American culture.

My sense about America—as opposed to other Western countries—is that we are passionate about religion and we tolerate politics, whereas in other western countries, politics is really the central organizing principle. In many Western countries religion is a marginal pursuit for a relatively small number of people while a wide selection of political parties regularly clash. In America, we have two very centrist political parties, maybe three if you count the Reform Party, and a huge spectrum of religious options. It seems to me that the First Amendment insured that social discontent would play itself out in the religious arena rather than the political arena.

Perhaps we should see the role of some of the more acerbic or controversial religious leaders as providing a societal steam valve or pressure outlet?

I think religion and the pursuit of spirituality in general have served as safety valves for social unrest. What disturbs me about the debates over the church/state

separation these days is that many of the people associated with the religious right are, I think, trying to collapse the distinction between church and state. I can't imagine a more damaging act for religion. Religion has flourished in America precisely because it has been voluntary and not compulsory. The minute you make it compulsory in some way, then it seems to me you kill the spirit of it.

I know historians are invested in interpreting past events, but, based on what you know, where are we headed as an incurably religious nation?

I certainly don't see any diminution of Americans' interest in religion and spirituality. If religion survived the 20th century, it is going to survive well into the future. The 20th century was a century in which technology, for a time, threatened to overtake religion. I think in the early 1960's we had a sense as Americans that science and technology were going to provide the answers to future problems. Science and technology have given us electric garage door openers and computers but haven't told us how to live and how to invest our lives with meaning. People are coming back to religion with a new energy and enthusiasm. Yet in a complex society such as ours, you have other competing demands. The quest for affluence consumes a lot of people. Modern society and the media offer all sorts of attractions. These distractions make the spiritual life harder to come by.

In one of your books you claim that religion in America flourishes "on the margins" rather than in the imposing cathedrals or historic religious

institutions. If you were to look for vitality in American religious life where would you look?

Look in church basements. Look in home Bible studies, and in "cell" or small groups within larger churches which are a key component to the success of places like Willow Creek Community Church, an evangelical suburban church near Chicago with more than 15,000 who attend weekly. Prayer groups, nursery school coalitions—small group expressions of spirituality that often springs up outside of dominant religious institutions offer real vitality.

There is also a real vitality in individual piety. I understand piety as an attitude toward life that sees the world as sacred or at least invested with the possibilities of the sacred. I know a lot of people, and I'd even like to put myself in that category, who find and derive a great deal of strength, a great deal of solace from their devotional lives. Their faith organizes their life. It is the central facet of the way they live or at least want to live.

Finally, let me ask you a more personal question. You've called yourself a spiritual pilgrim in print. Where has this pilgrimage taken you?

I certainly grew up as an evangelical, almost a fundamentalist in many ways, so that part of me is well known to anybody who has read anything I've written. I made it fairly safely through college with all of that intact. I spent five years as a graduate student at Princeton where I started attending the Episcopal Church. I really enjoyed the liturgy and particularly the music. I think part of my attraction to the Episcopal Church while a graduate student derived in part from my reaction to the aesthetic deprivation

of my fundamentalist past. And then an odd thing happened. After I finished my first book, I decided to do a second book, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America* which took me to churches across the country. The music had a very powerful, evocative hold on me and pulled me back into the evangelical orbit in the last ten or fifteen years. And so I call myself an evangelical and I do so without apology. The gospel is something I am not willing to give up, even if I could. I love the good news, and I am well aware that I would be lost without it. My faith has sustained me through some rather difficult times.

ILLUMINATIONS

Though I am weak and tired now,
And my youthful step long gone,
Leaning on this staff,
I climb the mountain peak.
My cloak cast off, my bowl overturned,
I sit here on this rock.
And over my spirit blows
The breath
Of liberty

~Mettika from Therigatha, Songs of the Buddhist Nuns, *6th Century B.C.E.*

Some friendships are made by nature, some by contract, some by interest, and some by souls.

~Jeremy Taylor, 17th Anglican Bishop

Liberty is the soul's right to breathe.

~Henry Ward Beecher, 19th Century American clergyman

I could not be leading a religious life unless I identified myself with the whole of mankind, and that I could not do unless I took a part in politics.

~Mohandas K. Gandhi, 20th Century Indian spiritual and political leader

I am a God of a thousand names:
why cannot one of them be
Woman singing?

~Catherine de Vinck, 20th Century poet
"The Womanly Song of God"

[Your wildflowering poor]

Your wildflowering poor,
O Lord,
gather along roadsides,
like the yellow goldenrod
of the wide Dakotas
& the bright fireweed
of the mountains of Montana.
They populate gullies
beside the tasseling corn;
make do in the margins
between rockslide & gravel.

Yet your arrows of wind,
O Lord,
route them to our gardens
& the high window boxes
of walled condominiums,
where in sunless shadow
they root & bloom,
surprising us,
Or Lord,
with a rich poverty,
a sorrow not of our own.

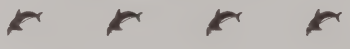
Chet Corey is a Covenant Affiliate of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, (LeCrosse, WI). His poetry has appeared most recently in ArtWord Quarterly *and* Communitas; *a short story is forthcoming in* Windhover: a Journal of Christian Literature. *He lives in Bloomington, MN.*

Robert Campbell

The Little Mermaid

Mary Murphy

"Far out at sea the water is clear, and as blue as cornflowers. But it is very deep, so deep that no ship's anchor could ever reach the bottom. Mermaids and mermen live down there, and the mer king has his palace on the seabed, where wonderful plants and trees grow, swaying gracefully with the movement of the water. The palace itself is built of coral, its windows are all clear amber and its roof is made of shells that open and close to show the shining pearls they hold. . . ."



It's warm July at the Jersey shore. Olivia is eight. She and I walk on the beach amid sand castles, freshly dug holes and clear, fat jellyfish. The daisy shaped jellyfish have washed up early this year because of the extremely hot temperatures. The sun, oppressive at its height, has gone down

Mary Murphy is a professional storyteller who will tell Sacred Stories on Saturday, June 17, 2000 during "Companions on the Sacred Journey," Fellowship in Prayer's 50th Anniversary Conference to be held in Princeton, NJ. More of her stories are available at <www.albany.net/~hello>

in a smoky red haze but the night is still a few minutes away. The sand scalded our toes earlier in the day. Now it's cool and we've been walking for quite a while—caught between the darkening ocean and the sea of lights that is the motels and restaurants of Wildwood Crest, New Jersey. Using her long-handled shovel, Olivia is scooping up the large jellyfish with the red centers. She is doing this as a public service on behalf of other bathers—this afternoon the lifeguard told us that these larger jellyfish have a small, harmless sting. Balancing the flaccid, scarlet corpses on her shovel, she flings them as far out to sea (about four feet) as she can.

We come suddenly upon a large hole dug in the wet sand. It is clear that it is a mass jellyfish grave—they are piled high. As the surf moves up the beach the hole fills with foamy water and the jellyfish are dragged from their resting place. The waves set them jiggling in a capricious, undignified way they surely never did in life. It's a vision at once macabre and humorous. I tell Olivia we should make a horror movie—call it "Night of the Living Dead Jellyfish." Olivia does not find this funny. "Mom, I'm totally creeped out" she declares. "It's like they're alive . . . only . . . they're dead . . . but they're still moving. I mean they're not ghosts or anything because there's no such thing as ghosts . . . right Mom? But they're still moving . . . even though they're de--." Olivia's obviously spooked so I draw her attention away from jellyfish to a small human figure waving at us from the other side of the ocean-filled hole.

A young girl, probably Olivia's age, in a green and white two-piece bathing suit, has just popped up from a colorful beach towel. She skirts the jellyfish grave and presents herself breathlessly before me. "Can she play

with me?" She points at Olivia but keeps her eyes on me. Her sudden appearance and the dusky light make her seem more apparition than real. For a moment I'm almost as spooked by this girl as Olivia is by the jellyfish. "Can she play with me?" the girl asks again a bit louder this time—as though she'd figured out that my problem is deafness. I glance at Olivia. She is eager to accept the invitation. She has had only her younger cousin Brian to play with since our vacation started. His slam-bam "Let's throw things!" style is getting pretty old. He spent the whole afternoon trying to stomp jellyfish hard enough so their guts squish out. ("Duh . . . Brian—What guts?" Olivia had asked her voice dripping with sarcasm.) She really could use a new friend.

But something is wrong and we both notice it. We look past this forlorn little girl for the grownup or older kid she must be with. But there is no one: no big brother or sister looking bored on the towel, no mother or father gathering beach toys, books or chairs—preparing to go home. No one. The girl is alone on a long stretch of Jersey shoreline at nightfall. My stomach turns over at the thought of all that could happen to such a child. Her fluffy beach towel has a full length portrait of Disney's Little Mermaid on it. It's held flat by sand toys at all four corners. The Mermaid's cheerful wave and brilliant smile seem to emphasize the real little girl's friendlessness.

"My name is Peggy." She points again. "What's hers? My real name is Margaret. I was named after my grandma but she died before I was born so I never got to know her. I'm . . . uh . . . I'm nine years old. I live with my Dad. See that beach towel over there? It's got the Little Mermaid on it. I love her. My Dad bought it for me when we got here. He's really great! He'll buy me anything I want if I ask for it

Mary Murphy, Olivia, Marilynn, and Brian

long enough." The words are rushed out of her on a single breath. Before I can ask where this "great Dad" is at the moment, Olivia decides to speak for herself: "My name's Olivia. Who's taking care of you?"

"Oh my Dad's watching me from our motel room through his binoculars. He can see us right now." She waves vaguely, across 300 yards of beach front, toward the distant row of motels as though that should prove that we're being watched. "We're staying at the Star Motel.

See the big star all lit up? I've been wishing on that star every night. Last night I wished for someone to play with. You must have been sent by the star, Olivia!" I figure she's talking so fast to get us to stay or because it's such a long, long time between listeners.

Olivia seems to buy the "My Dad's watching me through his binoculars" story so I try not to show how much it appalls me. "Can I play with her for a while, Mom, please?" They are both staring up at me. Peggy seems small for nine. She takes Olivia's hand as naturally as she might her mother's. On my right, I feel the clamor and chaos of the approaching surf. The water edges up to wet the Little Mermaid's fin on the beach towel before slinking away, biding its time. If she stays pinned under the sand toys much longer, the mermaid will surely be carried off and hidden beneath the waves.

The girls take my silence for yes. "C'mon!" yells Peggy running up the sand, "We'll play tag!" Olivia starts to follow but I catch her tee shirt and pull her back. "Wait, Olivia. It's too late for you to start a game now. It will be dark out here soon. We've got to get back to the hotel. Daddy will be worrying about us. Besides it's almost bedtime." Peggy marches back to me incredulous. "Bedtime? Only babies go to bed now. My Dad let's me stay up till midnight every night! He doesn't care—even if I stay awake all night!" She flops down on the Little Mermaid towel and repeats softly, "He doesn't care."

Olivia seems torn between envy of someone so free of rules and fear that a time would come when she is that free. The fear wins out and she takes my hand. Peggy watches as her star-sent friend betrays her and turns her head away to be cradled on the breast of the mermaid. She seems not to notice the chilly water that washes her

ankles. I think she is trying to make the mermaid's embrace feel like a real hug.

"I've got an idea," says Olivia. "Can we walk Peggy to her motel so we can see her room and I can wish on the giant star?" "Great idea, Olivia." I say. "Come on Peggy, let's pick up your towel and get going. We'll make sure you get home safely and, if you like, you and Olivia can make plans to meet on the beach tomorrow."

Peggy curls up tighter on her towel. "I told you it's not my stupid bedtime! Anyway, I can't go back there yet. Dad said 'Leave us alone for a couple of hours—go play on the beach.'" She sits up rubbing sandy, wet eyes, "So go on home to your daddy, Olivia. I don't need you. I'll wish for somebody else."

Look! I can see the other half of the moon.

At any other time Peggy's tone and words would be extremely offensive to Olivia. But today she seems to recognize another child's need to save face. She lets go of my hand and goes to kneel next to the mermaid beach towel. "Please come with us Peggy. It's not safe here. Someone might take you. You're just a kid."

But now Peggy leaps up and swoops the wet beach towel over her shoulders like a cape. "I'm not just a kid." She dances away from us. "I'm a little mermaid. I live under the sea in a wonderful kingdom with my father, the king, and my beautiful sisters. I'm magic. I can go anywhere in the world just by swimming in the ocean. Soon my legs will turn back to fins and I can swim to my splendid castle beneath the waves." She is running now, towel cape flying out behind her—a barely visible waif, splashing in and out of the surf. "And my friends, Flounder and Sabastian, will be wait-

ing to play with me and we'll be best friends forever!" She turns back once more, "Hey Olivia! Look up at the sky. I can see the other half of the moon!" And then she is gone.

Olivia takes my hand and looks up at me. "It's time to go home" I tell her. She nods and we start walking. The beach looks like a vast, empty desert we must cross. There are only a few others walkers—mostly young couples. We walk far up on the dry sand to avoid the chilly water and the tactile surprise of a squished jellyfish. The moon is as Peggy described it. It's such a bright night that the dark side is visible in outline surrounded by millions of stars. Olivia stands for a moment, staring at the moon. She closes her eyes and moves her lips silently. "What did you wish for?" I ask. "Something about Peggy," she replies. "I can't tell you."

We reach the steep wooden stairs that will bring us to street level. As we climb the stairs, a lone man passes us on his way down to the beach. At the bottom, he stops to light a cigarette and then moves off in the direction we've just come from—the strip of sand where Peggy waits for her mermaid fins. "Mom," whispers Olivia, "do you think that's Peggy's Dad coming to take her home?" "Probably not." I say. Then she says even more quietly, "I'll tell you what I wished for on the moon: I wished Peggy really could have fins and that she could swim home." I give my daughter's hand a hopeless squeeze remembering that in the Hans Christian Andersen version of "The Little Mermaid" the mermaid can never return to her home under the water after the sea witch gives her legs.

> *". . . Tell me more about human beings" said the little mermaid to her grandmother. "Well child, their earthly lives are shorter than ours for we live three hundred years," said the old lady. "But when we die*

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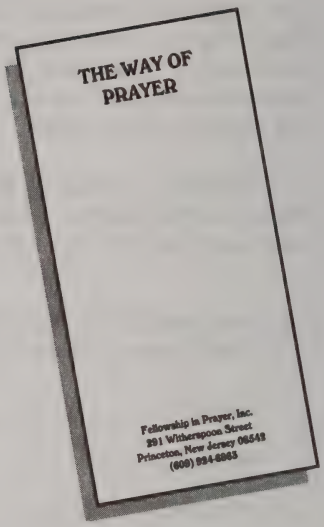

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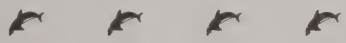
Please use this space to tell us your thoughts about this publication, *Sacred Journey.*

we are gone forever like foam on the sea, while humans have immortal souls and rise to the stars in the sky after death. The only way one of us could ever get a soul is to have a human being love her."



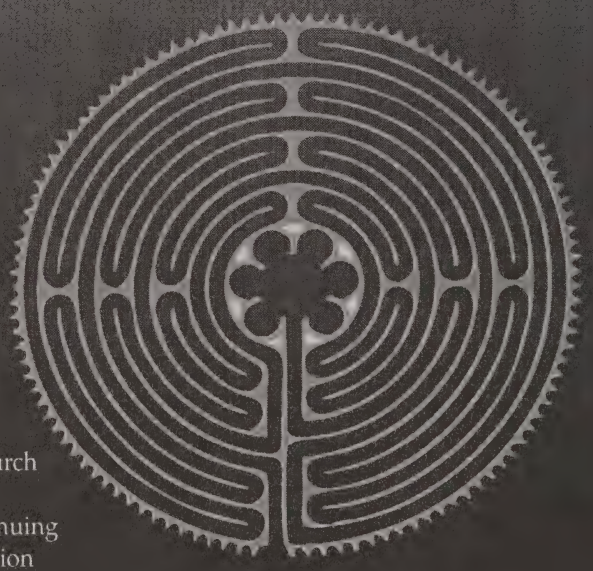
It's warm July at the Jersey shore. As we reach the brightly lit street and head for home I think about giving Olivia extra kisses when I tuck her in tonight. Then I recall the mermaid, alone and unloved on the beach, and I shiver as though it were suddenly winter.

Tom Dunham

Companions on the
SACRED JOURNEY

A Conference Celebrating
Fellowship in Prayer's
50th Anniversary

Friday, Saturday, and Sunday
June 16, 17, and 18, 2000



Presented by

Fellowship in Prayer
Princeton University:
The Office of the
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The pastoral beauty of the campus and the historic, centuries-old buildings of Princeton University will be home to Fellowship in Prayer's 50th Anniversary celebration.

In that beautiful setting, at the start of the new millennium, you will meet and share your hopes and doubts, your fears and faith, with a unique gathering of spiritual leaders, doctors, authors, therapists, and other companions on the path whose search for and experience of the Divine or Ultimate Source can help you on your own sacred journey.

Program

Friday, June 16

2:00 to 6:00 p.m. — Registration
6:00 p.m. Shabbat Service — Rabbi Marcia Prager
8:00 p.m. Keynote Speakers — "Hide and Seek: The Languages of Prayer" — Drs. Ann and Barry Ulanov

Saturday, June 17

8:00 a.m. — Registration
10:30 a.m. — Workshops (each to be offered twice: at 10:30 a.m. to noon and at 2:00 to 3:30 p.m.)

- ✦ Prayer and Human Wholeness — Rebecca Laird
- ✦ Frustration as a Doorway to Spiritual Growth — Robert Corin Morris
- ✦ The Path of Blessing: Experiencing the Energy and Abundance of the Divine — Rabbi Marcia Prager
- ✦ Celtic Christianity — Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB and Mairead Doherty
- ✦ Awakening Love and Compassion — Venerable Gelongma Trime Lhamo
- ✦ The Mystic Heart — Br. Wayne Teasdale
- ✦ Creativity as a Spiritual Practice — Dr. Rachel Harris
- ✦ Your Spirit at Work — Denise Lyons
- ✦ The Labyrinth: Walking a Sacred Path — Beth Haynes
- ✦ Dancing as a Way of Prayer — Robin Becker

2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. — Workshops
4:00 p.m. — Prayer Circles
8:00 p.m. Evening Address — "Prayer, Healing, and the Respiritualization of Modern Medicine" — Dr. Larry Dossey
9:15 p.m. — Taize service in the University Chapel

Sunday, June 18

10:00 a.m. Closing Ceremony: Music, dance, and Psalms: Ways of celebrating the sacred journey.

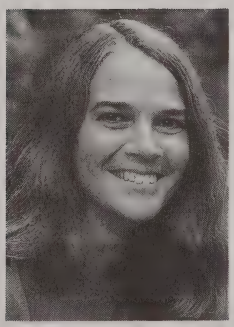
For information —
Call 609-924-6863

STAND UPRIGHT: THE SACRED JOURNEY OF SARAH GRIMKE

Elizabeth Bartlett

All I ask of our brethren is, that they will take their feet from off our necks, and permit us to stand upright on that ground which God designed us to occupy."

Sarah Grimke, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*



Sarah's sacred journey began in the depths of the slaveholding South. Born the daughter of a slaveholder in South Carolina in 1792, Sarah Grimke felt her spirit repulsed and outraged when she witnessed the whipping of a slave at the age of five. Had she been allowed to follow her passion for education and law, she would have followed the leading of her spirit to become ". . . a protector of the helpless and the unfortunate." However, these callings were barred to her because of her sex. Instead, she plunged into the life of the stereotypical "Southern belle." But her days of parties and balls came to a halt under the influence of a

Elizabeth Bartlett, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Minnesota-Duluth, teaches a course on "Women, Religion, and Spirituality." She is author of Liberty, Equality, Sorority: Origins and Interpretations of American Feminist Thought: Frances Wright, Sarah Grimke, and Margaret Fuller. *She lives with her husband and son in Duluth.*

Presbyterian minister who warned her that her frivolous life would bring everlasting punishment down upon her. Thus began years of spiritual despair and self-deprecation.

A turning point in her spiritual journey came when she followed her ill father to Philadelphia where she first made her acquaintance with Quakers. She was moved by the Quaker idea that women and men are equal through inner light, and felt a calling from God to become a Quaker minister. Ironically, she found that not all were treated equally in the Society of Friends. She was very disappointed in the blatant racial prejudice among the Friends. Many white Friends were unwilling to associate with blacks, and had even set up a separate bench for blacks in the meeting. Further, to become an abolitionist was to lose caste in the Society. Sarah eventually left the Society of Friends to follow the stronger calling of abolitionism. She became a prominent abolitionist with the American Anti-Slavery Society, stomping the country with her sister, Angelina, between 1833 and 1840, painting the evils of slavery and vindicating the anti-slavery character of the Bible. In another irony, it was because of her efforts on behalf of abolition of slavery that Sarah experienced discrimination on the basis of her sex. Everywhere she and Angelina went speaking against slavery, they were met with ridicule and harassment for speaking to "promiscuous" (meaning mixed gender) audiences. Increasingly Sarah felt the condemnation of Protestant clergy who argued that she was stepping out of the appropriate bounds of a "woman's sphere." The most vicious attack came in 1837 in the form of a Pastoral Letter from the Council of Congregationalist Ministers of Massachusetts, which denounced their behavior as unwomanly, inappropriate, and "unnatural." "We invite

your attention to the dangers which at present seem to threaten the female character with widespread and permanent injury," the pastors wrote. "The appropriate duties and influence of women are clearly stated in the New Testament. . . . We appreciate the unostentatious prayers of women in advancing the cause of religion at home and abroad; in Sabbath-schools; in leading religious inquirers to the pastor for instruction . . ." but Sarah had clearly gone beyond these bounds when she assumed "the place and tone of a man as a public reformer."

Rather than being silenced, however, Sarah responded with letters of her own; and not just one letter, but fifteen; and not private letters of apology and supplication, but letters boldly published in William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator,* adamantly stating her case. Eventually these became a separate tract, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*, one of the most important documents of the early women's rights movement in the United States. In the letters, Sarah not only responded to the pastors' immediate concern of women speaking in public, but went on to chronicle the condition of women in the United States, Europe, Asia, and Africa; to analyze the laws affecting women; to examine the inequities women faced in education and employment; to address the specific injuries suffered by female slaves; and perhaps most significantly, to provide a biblical justification for the moral autonomy and equality of women.

All are endowed with an inner light.

As historian Gerda Lerner has pointed out, feminist biblical criticism has been around for a thousand years, but because women's works were not published, women's

history unknown, and women largely kept illiterate, later critics were ignorant of earlier works, so their arguments tended to repeat each other. Grimke's was no exception. Nevertheless, her work is still revelatory, even today. Grimke provided "new" interpretations of key scriptural verses to demonstrate their support for the essential equality of women and men. For example, in the story of creation, Grimke argued, God gave man and woman dominion over all other creatures, but not over each other. This view, she argued, was supported by the second account of creation, because God created woman to be a *helpmeet* to man, meaning a companion in all respects. "It was to give him a companion, *in all respects* his equal; one who was like himself a *free agent*, gifted with intellect and endowed with immortality; not a partaker merely of his animal gratifications, but able to enter into all his feelings as a moral and responsible being." As for Eve making women responsible for bringing sin into the world, Grimke saw it differently . . . it appears to me that to say the least, there was as much weakness exhibited by Adam as by Eve. They both fell from innocence, and consequently from happiness, *but not from equality*." As far as women being condemned by God to be in eternal subjection to their husbands, Sarah saw this not as a curse and a command, but rather as simple prophecy. This is indeed what woman's plight had become:

> All history attests that man has subjected woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasures, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort; but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill. He has done all he could to debase

and enslave her mind; and now he looks triumphantly on the ruin he has wrought, and says the being he has thus deeply injured is his inferior.

Grimke did agree with the clergy that the "appropriate duties and influence of women are clearly stated in the New Testament", and appreciated her brethren for pointing this out, but entirely disagreed as to the nature of these duties. If public prayers and efforts were indeed ostentatious, then, Grimke argued, Ann the prophetess who prayed in the temple day and night was ostentatious, and Paul encourages women to be ostentatious in their efforts to spread the gospel. Yes, the duties of women are spelled out in the New Testament, she argued, and these are that women, like men, are to let their light shine upon the world. "Ye are the light of the world" applies to women and men alike.

> Men and women were CREATED EQUAL; they are both moral and accountable beings, and whatever is right for man to do, is *right*, for woman. But the influence of woman, says the Association, is to be private and unobtrusive, her light is not to shine before man like that of her brethren; but she is passively to let the lords of the creation, as they call themselves, put the bushel over it, . . . How monstrous, how anti-christian, is the doctrine that woman is to be dependent on man! Where in all the sacred Scriptures, is this taught? . . . This doctrine of dependence upon man is utterly at variance with the doctrine of the Bible. In that book I find nothing like the softness of woman, nor the sternness of man: both are equally commanded

> to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, love, meekness, gentleness, etc.". . . [I]t seems to me utterly inconsistent with the dignity of a Christian body, to endeavor to draw such an anti-scriptural distinction between men and women. Ah! how many of my sex feel in the dominion, thus unrighteously exercised over them, under the gentle appellation of *protection*, that what they have leaned upon has proved a broken reed at best, and oft a spear.

Though Sarah eventually retired from public life to help her sister, Angelina, raise her family, Sarah remained connected to the women's rights movement, occasionally writing an article for a feminist publication or marching for a feminist cause. Throughout her life, her vision and message remained that all, male and female, black and white, are endowed with an inner light, and each being is put on earth for the full and free expression of that light. Over twenty years after writing her *Letters*, Sarah wrote of how she was beginning to see this light begin to shine in the women of the next generation. Her words speak just as well to the women in my Women, Religion, and Spirituality classes more than one hundred fifty years later:

> There is now predominant in the minds of intelligent women to an extent never known before a struggling after freedom, an intense desire after a higher life. Let us not imagine that because superstition, blind faith in unexamined and untenable dogmas are losing their power over the mind of woman, that her religious nature will be swept away. Far from it. The fact that woman has

eaten the bitter fruits of slavery to the will and selfishness and passions of man has prepared her to receive the truths revealed to her by the spirit of God of her own selfhood. Hitherto there has been at the root of her being a darkness, in harmony, bondage and consequently the majesty of her being has been obscured, and the uprising of her nature is but the effort to give to her whole being the opportunity to expand into all its essential nobility.

More than two centuries after her birth, Sarah Grimke's words continue to call women and men to "stand upright on the ground God designed us to occupy."

Nishmat

*The traditional Jewish morning prayer service includes a passage that begins "*Nishmat kol chai tivarekh et-shimkha,*" "The breath of all life blesses your Name." This interpretive rendering of that prayer by Rabbi Arthur Waskow draws on another Jewish tradition: The traditional "unpronounceable" Name of God is "YHWH," with no vowels (not "Jehovah" or "Yahweh"). Try pronouncing it!*

You Whose very Name—
YyyyHhhhWwwwHhhh—
Is the Breath of Life,
The breathing of all life
Gives joy and blessing to Your Name.

As lovers lie within each other's arms,
Whispering each other's name
Into the other's ear,
So we lie in Your arms,
Breathing with each breath
Your Name, Your Truth, Your Unity.

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You alone,
Your Breath of Life alone,
Guides us,
Frees us,
Transforms us,

Heals us,
Nurtures us,
Teaches us.

First, last,
Future, past,
Inward, outward,
Beyond, between,
You are the breathing that gives life to all the worlds.
And we do the breathing that gives life to all the worlds.

As we breathe out what the trees breathe in,
And the trees breathe out what we breathe in,
So we breathe each other into life,
We and You.

YyyyHhhhWwwwHhhh.

יהוה
יהוה

At Every Boundary the World is One

The central Jewish prayer affirmation is "Sh'ma Yisrael, YHWH elohenu YHWH echad: *Hear, Godwrestlers: Breath of Life is our God: Breath of Life alone." It is traditionally followed by three paragraphs that evoke loving response to the Unity and how to carry that love into action in the world. This is an interpretive rendering of those passages.*

~Rabbi Arthur Waskow

On finishing the chant of the Sh'ma itself, the prayer leader says the following:

1. And when we come to a doorway between the risky world and our safe homes, when we might believe these are two separate worlds—then we pause at the doorway to remember to remind ourselves: [Everyone chants: "*Sh'ma Yisrael YAH eloheynu YAH echad . . .*"]

2. And when we come to the doorway in time between our active rising up and our dreamy, sleepy lying down, when we might believe these are two separate worlds—then we pause at that moment to remember to remind ourselves: [Everyone chants: "*Sh'ma Yisrael YAH eloheynu YAH echad . . .*"]

3. And when we look at our hands and experience our eyes, when we might believe these are two separate worlds, the world of observing, watching, and the world of doing, making—then we pause to bind our eyes and hands together and we remember to remind ourselves: [Everyone chants: "*Sh'ma Yisrael YAH eloheynu YAH echad . . .*"]

4. And when we come to the gateway of our cities, the boundary of our own cultures and communities, when we might believe these are two separate worlds—the world where everybody speaks my language and the world of those bar-bar-barbarians out there—then we pause at that gateway to remember to remind ourselves: [Everyone chants: "*Sh'ma Yisrael YAH eloheynu YAH echad . . .*"]

5. And when we look beyond all human life at those beings that do not speak at all—mountains and rivers, ozone and oak trees, beetles and krill—when we might say they live in an utterly separate world beyond us, on which we have no effect at all—then we pause to remember that the poison we feed to earth and air and water feeds us poison, and we remember to remind ourselves: [Everyone chants: "*Sh'ma Yisrael YAH eloheynu YAH echad . . .*"]

6. And when we might assert one thing is certain, inside my skin I know what's what but everything outside me is mysterious and alien—these are two separate worlds— then we look at the fringes on the edges of our selves, we look at these fuzzy fringes made always of my own cloth and the Universe's air, we look to see that not good fences but good fringes make good neighbors, we look at these threads of connection that bind us to each other and we pause at that moment to remember to remind ourselves: [Everyone chants: "*Sh'ma Yisrael YAH eloheynu YAH echad . . .*"]

7. And when we come to that final doorway whose other side no one has ever seen, and we might think that through our final breathing-out we enter an utterly separate world —then we pause at that doorway to remember to remind ourselves: [Everyone chants, in a whisper: "*Sh'ma Yisrael YAH eloheynu YAH echad . . .*"]

Into the Heart of Love

Nan C. Merrill

Heart of my heart, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will, and whatever You may do, I thank You. I am ready for all, I accept all. Let only your Will be done in me and in all your creatures: I wish no more than this, my Friend.

Into your Hands I commend my soul. I offer it to You with all the love of my heart. For I love You and so need to give myself, to surrender myself into your Hands without reserve and with boundless confidence—for You are the Heart of my heart.

This (slightly adapted) prayer of abandonment of Charles de Foucauld* awakened me to a new life some fifteen years ago. As I continued to pray it daily, I became more and more conscious of Divine Love working in and through me and of being led by the Spirit.

This is a dangerous prayer unless one is ready for deep transformation! For the first few years I struggled and stumbled over various parts of the prayer. I repeated them by faith out of an inner imperative and deep yearning I could not then articulate. The lingering old tapes I carried of God as a stern judge ready to punish at the slightest provocation made utter surrender difficult. I feared that in giving myself totally, like Job, all that I loved would be taken away.

**Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916) was a French aristocrat and cavalry officer whose conversion led him to become a hermit in the Algerian desert. Nan Merrill is author of* Psalms for Praying *and* Meditations and Mandalas, *and editor of the* Friends of Silence Newsletter. *She resides in Jericho, VT.*

Then came a surprise by the Spirit, a moment of grace! In the midst of praying one morning, I suddenly *knew* with every cell of my being that the Divine Hope for each one of us is to live in the deep peace the world knows not and the inner joy beyond understanding, to experience the abundance of creation's gift, and to reach the fullness of our individual potential. From the day of that realization, the prayer of abandonment became for me a song of gratitude.

The following poem is one expression of the fruit of this prayer:

As I abandon myself into the Heart of Love
    utter freedom becomes the gift
No prison bars needed here—
    for I surrender willingly . . .

Utter freedom becomes the gift—
    now we are bound in Oneness
For I surrender willingly
    and love becomes me—

Now we are bound in Oneness
    united with all beings on Earth
And love becomes me—
    joyfully, I dance the Dance of Life . . .

United with all beings on Earth
    no prison bars needed here—
Joyfully, I Dance of Life
    as I abandon myself into the Heart of Love.

A Little Like Lazarus

Wendy Wilson Greer

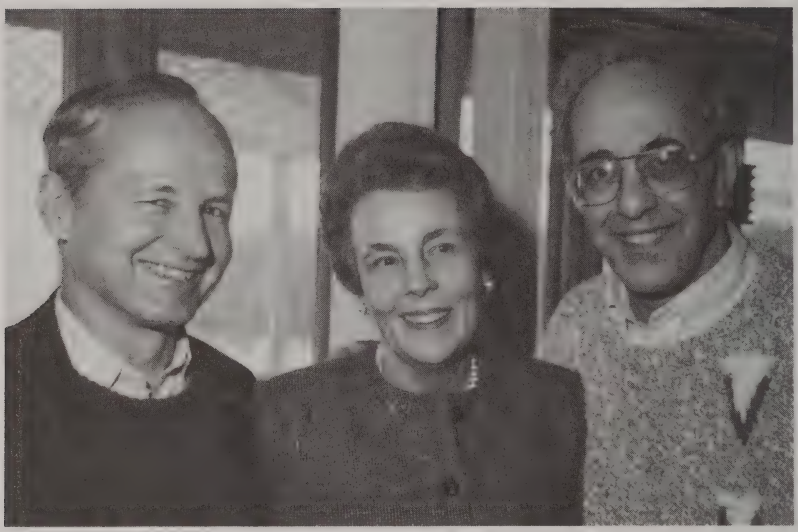
During most of my life I have been on a spiritual journey searching for God, trying to form a close relationship with God through prayer and reading the Bible and religious books. It has taken me many, many years, however, to discover that during all this time it was God who was searching for me.

In *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Henri Nouwen poses what are, at least for me, three surprising questions. He writes, "How am I to let myself be found by God?" *Not* how might I find God. "How might I let myself be known by God?" *Not* how am I to know God." And lastly, "How am I to let myself be loved by God?" *Not* how am I to love God.

God is searching for us in the distance—for each one of us—trying to find us, longing to bring us home.

According to Nouwen, leaving home is denying the spiritual reality that we belong to God. Leaving home is

Wendy Wilson Greer is the Director of the Henri Nouwen Society founded to "share the spirituality of solitude, community and compassion that was embodied in the life of Henri Nouwen," the prolific writer of spiritual books who was featured in the December, 1997 issue of Sacred Journey. *For more information on the Henri Nouwen Society write P.O. Box 230523, Ansonia Station, New York, NY 10023.*



Jay and Wendy Greer and Henri Nouwen

living as though we do not yet have a home. He writes, "Home is the center of my being where I can hear the voice that says, 'You are my Beloved, on whom my favor rests.'" When we hear that voice we know that we are home with God—that we have nothing to fear. God wants each one of us to claim our belovedness.

Henri Nouwen asks, "To whom do I belong, to God or to the world?" He says the voices of the world are loud, full of promises, and very seductive. "Go out and prove that you are worth something," prove that you are worth loving by being successful, popular, and powerful. The world says you must earn love by hard work and determination. These voices push us to do everything we can to gain acceptance and love by leading busy, productive and successful lives. These voices lead us to deny our belovedness and pull us toward a far country.

A little over ten years ago, I was dragged into a far

country by a devastating and crippling depression. It lasted for two very, very long years. It was an unbelievable time of anguish and feeling lost. I was unable to concentrate on anything, to communicate on any level, to laugh or to cry, to appreciate beauty in nature, music, art or literature, to listen to music or to play the piano, to sleep more than an hour or two a night, and worst of all, I was unable to give or to receive love. I felt totally alienated from everyone, especially God. My life had no meaning, no focus, no purpose.

This was a shattering experience for someone who had always excelled! In high school I won far too many honors. In my university class of 1,650 graduates, two awards were given to women. I won them both. I went on to win a prestigious teaching fellowship at a top music school; my faculty adviser said I was one of the best students he had ever had.

All this time God was searching for me.

A few years later I married a wonderful man who has blessed me incredibly for thirty-five years. We have three marvelous, bright, creative children who have brought us enormous joy. For many years I taught music, chaired benefits, served on various boards, organized and taught church school classes, and took on more and more and more responsibilities. In short, I thought I was very successful, very productive, but far too busy.

However, during my two-year depression I was unable to do anything but the basic household tasks and these very badly. I spent ninety per cent of my time lying on my bed or on the sofa, immobilized, staring blankly at the ceiling. I looked really scary. My eyes were sunk into my sockets from lack of sleep. I have never been thin in my life, but I lost

thirty-five pounds without even trying. Most of my friends dropped me; they didn't know what to do. And I felt God had totally abandoned me.

Although I faithfully attended church all my life, I no longer wanted to go to church. I was unable to pray or to read my Bible. But how fortunate I was, for God blessed me with a faithful, prayerful, loving husband, who made me say the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm every night, after which he would pray the benediction and his own beautiful heartfelt prayers. He insisted that I go to church with him each Sunday; he never gave up on me.

During this time I was hospitalized three times and for six or seven weeks each time. I tried to take my life because I felt I was such a burden to my family. I felt I was in quicksand and that I was dragging my family members in with me. I thought they would be so much better off without me. My suicide would be a sacrifice for them. I also had frequent panic attacks over money because of all my medical bills. I feared there wouldn't be enough money left over for our youngest child to go to college. Needless to say, I felt a failure.

Although I felt completely alienated from God, I didn't realize that all this time God was searching for me. God was closer than ever, trying to bring me home to a place where I could hear the voice calling me the Beloved.

After two horrific years God found me in the most unlikely place imaginable—in a first-class Hilton hotel in Brussels, of all places! I was feeling better by this time, but I was still crippled by depression. My husband had been asked by his law firm to visit their Brussels office. We flew to Brussels, and during the day I was taken around to see various sights, while he met with the staff in the office. Each evening we were entertained graciously,

and by the time we went to bed, we were totally exhausted. One night, in the middle of the night, I awoke from a deep, deep sleep, and I saw a figure of light gliding from the window to the end of my bed. The figure paused there, and I *knew* that I had been healed and I *knew* that I had been forgiven. I *knew* that I was loved. I felt the peace which passes all understanding, and for the first time in my life, I understood the true meaning of grace.

Although I was awake for the rest of the night, I was unable to tell my husband what had happened when he woke up; I was completely mystified! I kept thinking, why me? I have failed so badly in so many ways. What worse thing could I have done than attempt to take my life? Why would God choose to heal me when I felt so out of touch spiritually?

Finally on the second morning when we were eating breakfast in our room overlooking Brussels, my husband started to turn the BBC News on. I said, "Wait, turn it off! I have to talk with you." He looked at me and said, "What is with you? I have never seen you look so happy." I told him about the figure, tears streaming down my face. My husband, who had been the one who prayed so beautifully for my healing night after night for two years, looked at me and said, "Oh, it was probably the maid in her white uniform coming in to do something she had neglected to do earlier!" I couldn't believe what I was hearing and said, "At 2:00A.M.?"

Since that astonishing experience my life has never been the same. it has been totally transformed, turned upside down. All the things I thought were important no longer seemed important—what I did, how successful I was, what people said about me, how I looked, or how much money I had—all the outward, worldly signs. When those were

stripped away, the one thing that was left was my little, tiny soul—my little, tiny battered soul. But it was alive, and it was kept alive by the faithfulness of my beloved husband and other prayerful people. It was my soul that mattered most; it was my soul that was priceless.

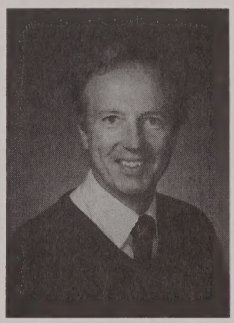
After we returned to New York I would rise early each morning to pray and read my Bible, tears often streaming down my face. My teenage son would come in for breakfast and put his hand on my shoulder and say lovingly, "What is it today?" I would reply, "It just seems that God wrote these words specifically for me, that God is speaking directly to me." Each passage gave me unbelievable inspiration and comfort. Each day was a gift I never expected to have. Each friend was more precious because I didn't think I had many friends.

One night a year later, when my husband and I were having a candlelight dinner alone, I looked at him and said, "Why are you smiling like that?" "Oh," he replied, "It is just wonderful to see you so happy!" And I said, "I must have been really hard to live with during the past year. I was so overflowing with gratitude, love, hope, confidence, and joy." He answered lovingly, "Yes, it was a little bit like living with Lazarus!" But you see, in a real sense, I had been dead, and I was alive again. I had been lost—so lost—but I had been found. I was constantly rejoicing, and I know God was too.

A theme which runs through many of Henri Nouwen's works is that it is in our broken place, in our woundedness, where we experience God in the most blessed way. It may not always be a figure of light and white that graces our bedroom in the middle of the night. But it is in those broken places where perhaps we are most open to God.

PRAYER SONG: MATINS ST. JOSEPH ABBEY

S. Kevin Regan



It was 3:15 A.M. I walked to the abbey church under and expansive black sky to pray with the monks of St. Joseph's Abbey. One planet shimmered, a solitary, fuzzy ball of light in the western sky. The moon, a silvery crescent, stood guard in the east. I walked the darkened earth as if alone in the universe.

Suddenly, the silence of the night was broken by the sound of one solitary bird. The notes were at first tentative like the toe placed cautiously in the ocean to test its coldness. Then other notes joined the first. These sounding more like the squeak from a door hinge in desperate need of oil. Then a new note was added, then another and another until a chorus of birds surrounded me with their music while drawing me into their communion of song.

I stopped to listen. Some notes were long and high and repeated with a measured cadence like the string of a violin repeatedly stuck at precisely the right place by the bow.

S. Kevin Regan's book Religion Teachers: Your Mission, Your Message *will be published this summer by Twenty-Third Publications. He lives in Rhode Island with his family.*

Janet Gnall

Others begin with a short burst of sound like the joyful chuckling of a tickled baby. Still others seemed to echo some inner excitement, like a little girl telling her mother she can now tie her shoes, "Look, mommy look!" but with notes instead of words. The transformation of silence into song was sublime.

Then the music ceased as quickly as it had begun. The birds disappeared save one. A small bird facing east toward sunrise remained on the pillar of the red brick wall leading to the guesthouse. She began a final, solitary tribute to morning. I stood, my silence uniting me to her perfect notes, allowing her song to rise as a prayer from my heart. As the abbey bell rang echoing the call to prayer sounding across the valley, I bowed in worship to the God whose holy presence is reverenced by the office of monks and by the song of the birds.

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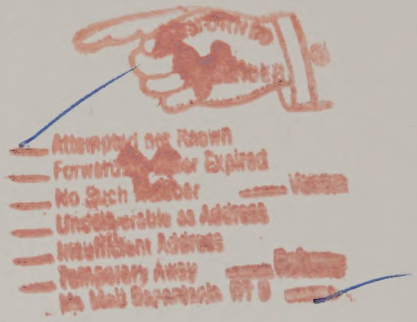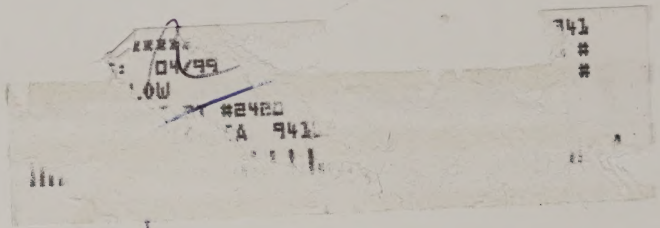
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